

Warfighting's Moral Domain

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THE ARMY'S NEXT keystone doctrinal instrument Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, must explain that the nature of modern warfighting, as it is likely to occur over the next five to six years, will differ substantially from that of two hundred years ago. Previous versions of FM 100-5 discussed the dynamic nature of warfare (a subject all too often omitted from documents of its type) as a product of the clash between opposing wills and the influence of the famed Clausewitzian imponderables—danger, fog, friction, chance and uncertainty. However, these versions failed to mention any circumstances or conditions likely to figure significantly in near-term warfighting, particularly within the moral domain. This is a serious doctrinal issue, especially since the conditions of warfare from 2000 to 2010 may confront the Army with greater challenges than it has faced even in the recent past. This article discusses those challenges and concludes that, to meet them, the Army must begin now to develop leaders with higher levels of maturity and experience and units with greater cohesion and flexibility.

It will not be enough for doctrine to refer to “modern” conflict. The nature of warfare defines elements that endure over time, and modern denotes a very broad and often ill-defined period of warfare that dates back to the Napoleonic era. The use of such terms leaves the impression that the tactics, techniques and procedures that served Napoleon's Imperial Guard or the World War I doughboy will work equally well for the proto-Force XXI warrior. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Although the Advanced Warfighting Experiments continue to yield important lessons, they have already taught the Army that information technology will introduce new and significant challenges to tomorrow's soldiers and leaders. Many of these challenges will emerge within the next five or six years, the period governed by the new version of

FM 100-5, and decisively shape the character of contemporary warfighting. FM 100-5 requires, therefore, a description of that character and of the specific aspects of contemporary warfighting likely to affect the Army's soldiers, leaders and units in the near-term. In support of this recommendation, we suggest that emerging technological capabilities of the 21st century and the operational concepts that employ them will give rise to four specific warfighting challenges:

- Increased complexity;
- Unparalleled speed and unrelenting tempo;
- Heightened physical and psychological isolation; and
- Unprecedented lethality.

Tomorrow's Warfighting Challenges

Increased complexity. The recent institutionalization of new warfighting dimensions such as information, space and the electromagnetic spectrum will dramatically increase contemporary battlefield complexity by introducing a greater number of independent and dependent variables into mission planning and execution.¹ Rapid, full-dimensional, highly integrated and synchronized future operations will generate a larger number of moving parts functioning at higher speeds and force even junior leaders to cope with increasing complexity. In addition, in the near-term dynamic geopolitical environment, leaders will likely encounter complex military-political problems requiring solutions outside the scope of established policies and rules of engagement. Tomorrow's leaders will probably find that centralized management will fail because the challenges of mastering the command and control (C²) process will overcome the human ability to concentrate on achieving the end result.²

Historically, improvements in command tools have resulted in increased battlefield complexity; the dynamics of warfare tend to push the number of moving parts to the limits of C². Information technologies (IT) will both enhance the capabilities of commanders to control their forces and tempt them to increase the number of elements requiring that

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not purport to reflect the position of the Department of the Army; the Department of Defense or any other government office or agency.—Editor

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control. Likewise, history shows that from the standpoint of the individual soldier, the sophistication and size of the warrior’s tool kit has grown over time—from the *gladius* and *pilum* of Caesar’s day to the chemical-based and wire-guided munitions of today. Near-term warfare will continue this trend by enlarging soldiers’ requisite skill sets. Knowledge of foreign languages, cultures, geography and demography will prove extremely useful even to small unit leaders as will a growing number of basic combat, mechanical, communicative and conceptual skills. Soldiers will have to know and do more than ever before, from performing operator-level maintenance on sensitive digital equipment to demonstrating competence with an ever growing number of tactics, techniques and procedures. As always, realistic training and well-understood doctrine will help simplify battlefield complexity. However, a multidimensional, rapidly changing battlefield will generate problems and contingencies not anticipated by such traditional preparation and guidance.

Unparalleled speed and unrelenting tempo. Because emerging technologies will afford them the opportunity to do so, tomorrow’s leaders and soldiers will likely operate within highly compressed planning and execution cycles and have less time for coordination or contingency planning.³ Soldiers at all levels will have to make decisions more quickly and, most likely, with less than optimum information and less room for error. IT will increase situational understanding, but heightened levels of speed and mobility will change the relevant common picture of the battlefield frequently and often dramatically. Leaders and decision makers must rapidly digest and act on an indeterminate and ever-changing amount of information. The heightened speed and tempo possible in the near term will generate greater physical and emotional stress for soldiers, thereby subjecting them to an increased risk of cognitive and psychological impairment.⁴

Heightened physical and psychological isolation. Extended battlefield dispersion may multiply the physical distance between soldiers, leaders and units heightening their sense of physical and psychological isolation. They will often have to fight as semi-isolated crews and small teams without physical or visual contact with friendly elements.

This physical separation will pose significant problems for an individual’s psychological resilience because soldiers have traditionally coped with danger by drawing confidence from the proximity of comrades and leaders. The extent to which IT and speed of movement can overcome or compensate for this dispersion remains an open issue. Incidentally, while the Army deliberates over whether to eliminate one or more of its warfighting echelons, the soldier’s psychological need for leadership and emotional support from comrades will limit organizational flattening of small-units.⁵

Unprecedented lethality. In the early 21st century, the combination of IT and fire control and targeting systems will enable commanders to destroy a division- or corps-sized enemy force almost instantaneously in a single, near-simultaneous strike. The increasing range of contemporary weapons will mean that lethal fires can come from any distance or direction, including space. No safe areas will exist other than those decreed by policy makers to limit the escalation of a conflict. Even small errors on such a battlefield can mean devastating fratricide or collateral damage. The unprecedented lethality of tomorrow’s battlefield will place tremendous pressure on soldiers and leaders to ensure precise mission planning and execution. While near-simultaneous, operational-level ambushes or multidimensional strikes may become the norm in conventional conflict, unconventional operations fought in hostile environments against primitive weapons will pose just as serious a threat to individual soldiers as combat involving sophisticated technologies. Lethality will assume many forms, from crude weapons of mass destruction to brilliant munitions.⁶

Responding to the Challenges via the Moral Domain

The Army can best meet the warfighting challenges of modern conflict in two ways—by developing mature, experienced leaders and by creating cohesion that offers a psychological safety net.

Mature, experienced leaders. In the near-term, Army leaders will need better cognitive flexibility to develop and apply unscripted solutions to multidimensional problems and then to conceptualize and evaluate a wide range of highly contingent outcomes. Battlefield intuition—the superior judgment that comes from years of training and experience—will remain as important to tomorrow’s leaders as it was to Caesar. The Army can best achieve and maintain this cognitive flexibility through the cultivation of mature, highly experienced leaders. Such leaders will offer at least four benefits to the Army:

- A mastery of increased skill sets.
- A greater experience in command and staff positions.

Collateral damage to city blocks near General Manuel Noriega's headquarters (arrow) in Panama, and (inset) an M1 Abrams tank hit by "friendly fire." Note the radiation contamination sign at the corner of the taped off area.



US Army. Inset Soldier of Fortune



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- A firm foundation for building battlefield intuition.
- A psychologically resilient core of leadership familiar and comfortable with their roles.⁷

Fortunately, OPMS XXI initiatives have already begun to move in this direction.

To complement their mature and experienced leaders, Army units must adapt quickly to changing situations. Flexible units allow leaders to initiate decisive, perhaps preemptive, action before a given situation unfolds. To build this unit climate, the Army will have to foster a broader learning-oriented culture that responds nearly spontaneously and simultaneously to unpredictable situations, operates inside the enemy's learning cycle, and encourages subordinates to exercise initiative and to assume responsibility.

Cohesive Units. Developing and maintaining stable, cohesive units will provide a superior foundation for developing such a culture.⁸ Soldiers who train together for long periods achieve shared conceptual models—common ways of understanding the general environment, their unit's capabilities and responses to specific situations.⁹ Such common conceptual models allow leaders, peers and subordi-

nates to act cohesively, with little or no communication, even in rapidly changing situations. In extreme cases, soldiers can predict each other's actions. Teamwork and predictive capacities increase with time.¹⁰ Together with proper training and doctrine, organizational adaptability will offer commanders a dynamic and invaluable combat multiplier.

Cohesive units can also supply soldiers with a psychological safety net to support them in tomorrow's more demanding battlefield environment. Cohesive units require little supervision, exhibit mutual trust, confidence and loyalty and can effectively handle complex tasks.¹¹ One intense experience may suffice to build loyalty and trust. Technical competence and individual self-confidence may require more time to develop, but will remain closely associated with the team's success during training events or actual warfighting experiences.¹² Evidence suggests a direct correlation between individual courage and soldiers' trust and confidence in their comrades.¹³ Thus, a cohesive, well-trained unit benefits from the synergism that comes from the collective contributions of its individual parts.¹⁴ Of course, as the historical examples of the crew of the *Bounty*, the French army in 1917, and the

German navy in 1918 indicate, proper leadership is necessary to avoid a "counter-culture" cohesion that undermines military discipline and acts contrary to the commander's intent.¹⁵

Fortunately, progress in synthetic training environments—virtual, constructive and live simulations—may allow the Army to compress the time required to develop experienced leaders and cohesive units. Synthetic environments allow safe, highly effective training with instant replay capability to identify and isolate errors or deficiencies in execution. Commanders, staffs and small units can work through a series of increasingly demanding exercises to build trust, confidence and unit readiness. Of course, live training will remain essential to both individual and unit development. However, realistic synthetic environments allow live training to serve as a finishing exercise that optimally uses time and other resources.

The Army's keystone doctrinal instrument, FM 100-5 should at least outline the battlefield conditions—or challenges—likely to confront our leaders and soldiers during the next five or six years—the usual tenure for a document of this type. This description is always fundamental because FM 100-5

sets the tone for the development of doctrine in all branches and special functions. But because modern conflict will likely present near-term unique challenges to warfighters, the need for FM 100-5's image of the battlefield is urgent. These challenges take the form of increased complexity, unparalleled speed and unrelenting tempo, heightened physical and psychological isolation and unprecedented lethality. To meet these challenges successfully, the US Army must begin now to develop leaders with greater maturity and experience, and to build highly adaptable, cohesive units. Experience and unit cohesion should serve as the centers of gravity—the "hubs" around which all else revolves—Force XXI and 2010. Near-term warfighting will likely leave less room for error and allow significantly less ramp-up time than *Desert Shield*. Accordingly, the old ways of doing business—paying lip service to the need for personnel stability and unit cohesion—will fail us on tomorrow's battlefield. We must use this transition period to examine seriously our warfighting requirements. Eventually, we must learn to fight within the optimal range of our capabilities while simultaneously forcing the enemy to operate beyond the limits of his own. **MR**

NOTES

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